

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00
USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1925

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY

AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 5528

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: AGREEMENT ON TALKS

1. THE PNA OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED IN ISLAMABAD ON MAY 26 THAT TALKS BETWEEN THE PNA LEADERS AND THE PM WILL BE HELD SHORTLY. SARDAR QAYYUM TOLD REPORTERS THAT "WE ARE PREPARED TO GO TO THE CONFERENCE TABLE AS SOON AS THE GOVERNMENT CHOOSES TO OPEN THE DIALOGUE." HE SAID THAT TENTATIVELY THE PNA NEGOTIATORS WOULD BE MUFTI MAHMUD, NAWABZADA NASRULLAH KHAN AND PROFESSOR GHAFOR, LEADERS OF THREE OF THE PNA PARTIES.

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WM THE CENTRAL QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER THERE WERE PRE-CONDITIONS AND WHAT GUARANTEES, IF ANY, WERE MADE THAT THE PRE-CONDITIONS WILL BE MET. THE MAJOR DAILIES IN PAKISTAN CONTINUE TO REPORT THAT THE TALKS WILL BE OPENED WITHOUT THE TWO SIDES HAVING AGREED ON ANY PRE-CONDITIONS BUT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SIGNS POINTING

TO THE OPPOSITE CONCLUSION. SARDAR QAYYUM, HIMSELF, EQUIVOCATED WHEN ASKED ABOUT ANY UNDERSTANDING. QAYYUM SAID THAT THERE WERE NO PRE-CONDITIONS BUT HE DID MENTION SEVERAL SUGGESTIONS WHICH THE PNA MADE TO THE PM DESIGNED TO MAKE THE TALKS MORE CORDIAL. INCLUDED WERE THE LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW IN THE CITIES, RELEASE OF THE DETAINED PNA LEADERS AND A PNA MOVE TO STOP THE STREET AGITATION. SARDAR QAYYUM POINTED OUT TO REPORTERS THAT THE PNA HAD NOT ISSUED THEIR USUAL CALL FOR FRIDAY DEMONSTRATIONS THIS WEEK.

3. THE PIR OF PAGARO, IN HIS PRESS STATEMENT MADE AFTER MEETING WITH MUFTI MAHMUD ON MAY 26, TOLD THE REPORTERS THAT THE PM HAD INDEED ACCEPTED SOME OF THE PNA DEMANDS. THE PIR SAID THAT THE WHOLE POINT OF THE DISCUSSIONS WAS TO TALK ABOUT THE WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENTS THAT HAD ALREADY BEEN REACHED. POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE AGREE THAT THERE WERE MOST PROBABLY SOME PRE-CONDITIONS OR THE PNA WOULD NOT HAVE AGREED TO THE TALKS. MOST SPECULATION, BASED ON PRESS REPORTS AND PNA-FED RUMORS, CENTERS AROUND AN AGREEMENT WHEREBY THE PM AGREES TO HOLD NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WITHOUT SETTING A DATE, FREES SOME OF THE DETAINED PNA LEADERS, LIFTS SOME OF THE PRESS RESTRICTIONS AND EASES SOME OF THE MARTIAL LAW RESTRICTIONS IN THE MAJOR CITIES. IN RETURN FOR THIS THE PNA WILL PROMISE TO STOP THE STREET AGITATION.

4. EVEN WITH THE EXISTENCE OF SUCH A PRE-AGREEMENT IT
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WILL STILL BE DIFFICULT FOR A FINAL SETTLEMENT OF THE CRISIS TO BE REACHED OVER THE CONFERENCE TABLE. ON THE ONE HAND, HARD-LINE PNA LEADERS, SUCH AS ASGHAR KHAN, HAVE EMPHATICALLY SAID THAT THEY WILL NOT GO ALONG WITH ANY AGREEMENT WHICH DOES NOT GUARANTEE THE REMOVAL OF THE PM. SIGNIFICANTLY, ASGHAR KHAN IS NOT INCLUDED AMONG THE PNA LEADERS LIKELY TO TAKE PART IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND THE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF THE TWO SIDES WITHIN THE NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS ISSUE ARE SO DIVERGENT THAT AN AGREEMENT WILL BE HARD TO REACH ON WHEN THE ELECTION WILL BE HELD OR WHAT THE MODALITIES WILL BE.

5. THE FACT THAT THE PNA HAS AGREED TO TALK AT ALL OFFERS CERTAIN SHORT-TERM ADVANTAGES TO THE PM. THE TALKS MAY DISCREDIT THE PNA LEADERSHIP IN THE EYES OF THE HARDLINE SEGMENT OF THE PARTY AS WELL AS ENGENDER FEAR ON THE PART OF MANY OTHER MEMBERS WHO ARE WARY OF BHUTTO'S POLITICAL SKILLS AND WHO DOUBT WHETHER THE

PNA LEADERSHIP CAN HOLD ITS OWN WITH HIM IN A CONFERENCE ROOM. THE OTHER AND MORE IMPORTANT PLUS FOR THE PM IS THAT HE HAS AGAIN BOUGHT HIMSELF MORE TIME. HE UNDOUBTEDLY REALIZES, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN WITH THIS INCREASED BREATHING ROOM, IF THE TALKS ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL, HE WOULD LIKELY FIND HIMSELF IN THE SAME POSITION HE HAS BEEN IN SINCE THE ELECTION. IF THE PNA EVENTUALLY GIVES UP ON ACHIEVING A SETTLEMENT AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE, IT WILL CALL ITS FOLLOWERS ONCE AGAIN INTO THE STREETS, PERHAPS WITH GREATER VIOLENCE, AND THE PM'S PROBLEMS COULD WELL INCREASE.

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